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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/EX,  
OBO FOR AD INTERIM DIRECTOR RICHARD SHINNICK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2018

TAGS: SU ABLD AMGT ASEC PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: BASHIR WILL REPORTEDLY APPROVE NEC CONTAINER  
RELEASE

REF: A. A) KHARTOUM 435

- ¶B. B) KHARTOUM 428
- ¶C. C) KHARTOUM 355
- ¶D. D) STATE 29995

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Al-Bashir told his Foreign Minister on March 25 that he is willing to authorize the release of NEC containers the same day the U.S. Administration "eases up on pressure on Sudan's diplomatic missions in New York and Washington." Alor complained about the lack of SPLM input in a non-paper presented to the United States and secured Al-Bashir's approval of SPLM participation in any future "technical team" that may meet with the Americans in the near future. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge Fernandez met with Foreign Minister Deng Alor the evening of March 25 to discuss Alor's earlier meeting in the day with President Omar al-Bashir to discuss, among other things, NEC construction (reftel a). Alor said that he complained to Al-Bashir that the Sudanese non-paper handed over to the Americans "was an NCP (National Congress Party) document, not a Government of National Unity document." He asked Al-Bashir that there be robust SPLM participation in any technical team that may meet with the Americans in the near future to discuss bilateral issues. Al-Bashir agreed.

¶3. (C) Alor told the President that MFA Under-Secretary Mutriff Siddiq would lead this team and a meeting could take place in the next 2-3 weeks "once the Americans have discussed our ideas and decided whether or not to proceed." Al-Bashir queried Alor about whether Siddiq was "senior enough" to be able to conclude a workplan with the Americans and Alor said that more senior Sudanese officials could always join the discussion if needed (Note: Mutriff Siddiq is an NCP insider, close to VP Ali Osman Taha, and a very able diplomat who negotiated the highly favorable - to Sudan - Addis Ababa agreement on the UN/AU hybrid force in 2006).

¶4. (C) "There is one other thing," Alor continued, "the containers for the Embassy." Al-Bashir reportedly said that "this is part of a larger deal with the Americans that we haven't arrived at yet." Alor countered "but we promised to go first, to take the first step with them." Al-Bashir then said: "ok, this is what we'll do: tell the Americans to pick a day. It can be this week, next week, whenever. On this day, they are ready to actually ease the pressure on our Missions in Washington and New York. On that day, we will go first and release their containers, construction can resume. They can reciprocate later that same day once Washington opens."

¶5. (C) In a separate discussion, Canadian CDA Sam Hanson told CDA Fernandez that Alor and Presidential Advisor Mustafa

Othman Ismail had presented a very positive analysis of the possibility of improved US-Sudanese relations to visiting Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier on March 25. Fernandez cautioned that "we're not there yet, by a longshot. There haven't been any formal discussions yet and there is no agreement either."

16. (C) Comment: Alor seems to have secured from the President agreement to release the containers and allow NEC construction to proceed as reciprocity in easing restrictions, mostly OFAC-related, on Sudanese diplomatic missions in the U.S. (see ref tel b for a description of the Sudanese complaints). This would supposedly remove the issue of "the Embassies" from the table as Alor promised Secretary Rice on February 12. But we continue to be concerned about the "expectations gap" between the Sudanese and ourselves about the possibility of rapid improvement in relations. Alor, and other senior Sudanese officials, have made very rosy pronouncements on such an outcome during the visit of SE Williamson and evidently continue to do so. If Al-Bashir is under the misconception - because of his advisors - that such an improvement will be easy or a relatively cost-free endeavor, there are bound to be misunderstandings or recriminations along the way. This is especially true given the fissures within the Government of National Unity and Al-Bashir's penchant for distraction, emotional decisions, and last-minute changes in policy direction. Carefully managing expectations with the Sudanese promises to be a major challenge. End comment.

FERNANDEZ